

Keeping e-mail subscribers engaged

Disengaged e-mail subscribers are one of an online marketer's worst enemies. Not only do they depress open, click-through and conversion rates, they can increase the cost of deploying your list and hurt message deliverability.

E-mail marketing best practices dictate removal of subscribers who haven't taken action with any of your e-mails in the past three to six months. But for many marketers, the thought of dropping even a few subscribers is a dreadful thought.

Do your development efforts, your conscience and your e-list a favor by cutting disengaged subscribers loose ... but only after trying a re-engagement campaign.

Here are five keys to successful e-mail subscriber re-engagement:

1. Create opportunities for action. The goal of a re-engagement campaign isn't to generate donations; it's to separate people who are still somewhat interested in your mission and/or appeals from those who have completely checked out (and probably won't see your re-engagement e-mail anyway.)

Make it easy for those still interested to take some kind of action. Ask them to tell you what they want to hear about by filling out a subscriber preference survey. Include a question on how often they want to hear from you (by clicking a link that says "weekly" or "monthly,"). Or use a simple yes/no question to ask subscribers if they're still interested in the benefit they get from your e-mails (this is a great opportunity to remind them of why they signed up in the first place.)

2. Incentivize re-engagement. To maximize response to your re-engagement campaign, offer an incentive to subscribers.

Free reports, prayer cards, e-newsletters and other relevant content can work well here: The important thing is to deliver value, re-affirm your relevance, and create reasons to continue your dialogue with re-engaged subscribers later.

3. Bring back your greatest hits. Remember, subscribers who aren't engaged now, used to open and click messages from you. Which of your e-mails got them to do that?

Look back into your campaign history to find your best-performing e-mails for ideas on what kind of content to offer to disengaged subscribers.

Better yet, identify groups of now dis-engaged subscribers who likely share an interest in specific areas of your mission, based on their past click activity and/or demographics. Segment your disengaged subscribers, and approach each group with a different angle.

4. Don't give up after one try. Even when subscribers were engaged, they didn't open or click on every e-mail. And don't assume they will open/click on your first re-engagement attempt.

Approach re-engagement as a series of two to three e-mails. Send the second message to subscribers who didn't respond to the first one, and the third to people who didn't respond to the second one. Starting with the second message, let subscribers know that if they don't respond, they will no longer receive the benefits of your e-mails. Use the last message in your sequence as a clear, urgent notification that subscribers are hearing from you for the last time unless they respond.

5. Know when to let go. No matter how effective your re-engagement campaign is, not everyone is going to respond to it. In fact, odds are good that more than half of the subscribers you target with it will not respond to any of your re-engagement e-mails.

Rather than seeing this as a loss, recognize it as affirmation that a bloated e-list is bad for your organization, and trusted relationship you have with your donors/subscribers.